

TOPICS OF AN OLD-TIMER

My Hamilton Reminiscences Continued
—Some Irish Lawyers—Cahill, the Martins, John Sheridan Hogan—Buchanan, Harris & Co., Great Wholesale Merchants—Some More Irish Hotel-Keepers—John Bradley, "Billy" Daley, "Alick" Borland—Mrs. Wilson, afterwards Mrs. Beatty, a graceful hostess—"Old Pat" Harvey, the Waterloo soldier—"Make way for the Chequered Store."—Consumption carried the Murphys off like the Smileys. Others for another issue.

I have received word from an unexpected source that my review of the late Mr. Durand's "Reminiscences" and my own recollections give pleasure to your readers, but more especially those of Hamilton, some of whom have a knowledge of the people and circumstances that I recall. I would have given more of these remembrances in my last only that I was afraid of monopolizing too much of your valuable space. I have yet to mention some persons that were of importance in old Hamilton days and of whom I have a vivid, and in some instances a kindly thought. The lawyer that drew up my indentures as an apprentice to John Robertson, the printer that printed Vicar-General Macdonell's paper "The Catholic" was an Irishman named Cahill—James Cahill. I well remember his face and figure, but he was not remarkable

for talent, nor was he in any particular way distinguished. He simply went to swell the professional list of the pioneer Irish of the city at the head of navigation; but I do not think he was affected by the beset-

ting Irish sin and kept a clear head. The most distinguished Irish lawyers in Hamilton, of whom I have any knowledge, were the Martins, father and two sons. I am not sure that the father, Richard Martin, was a lawyer; he was an estate gentleman in Galway and belonged to a noted family, and why he came to Canada with them is what I do not know. Two of the sons, Richard and John, studied law with a Mr. Freeman, I think. Freeman was a leading Hamilton lawyer and was a leader among the Reformers. The Colonel was a genial old gentleman and was very popular, and it was Mr. Hincks that secured his appointment as Sheriff of Haldimand, with the county seat at Cayuga. How long he has been dead I cannot say, but it must be a good many years. The son that was named after himself died in Windsor, Ont., but a few months ago, having acquired a good old age. The Martins are among the people that I call to recollection with pleasure, because there was a good deal of generosity and Irish feeling about them. They have not lived in Hamilton, however, for half a century.

John Sheridan Hogan, he who was murdered at the Don bridge in Toronto, was a resident of Hamilton in my early days there. He went to Hamilton from Toronto when a boy, and was apprenticed to the printing trade, but whom to, I never learned. He next studied law, I think in the office of Sir Allan Napier McNab, but he never reached any distinction as a lawyer. He did acquire some fame as a writer and essayist, having been a contributor to "Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine." He did not affiliate with the men of his own blood and lineage, but rather scorned their association. I knew him well. There was a good deal of personal vanity in his make-up.

He was a fine figure of a man, tall, good-looking and well-featured. But he wore his hair in curls like a woman, and that was no fashion for men then, either. In the early fifties he entered the newspaper field in Toronto and started a weekly sheet named the "United Empire Loyalist," which, like many others, some of my own included, turned out a failure. Think of a Tipperary boy attempting to figure in such a role!

I was associated with him later in the editorial department of Toronto's first daily paper, the "Colonist," after Samuel Thompson became the proprietor of that journal. He was first employed as parliamentary correspondent and afterwards as editorial writer. It was when employed on the "Colonist" that he was elected a member of the Canadian Parliament for the new County of Grey. I do not think he displayed any special merit as a legislator. His sad end, however, was greatly regretted. He was not addicted to intemperate habits and was a very companionable man. Whenever he went sharply after any politician, as he did after Dr. Rolph, he "polished him off." That was his own pet phrase. When he was the political editor of the Daily "Colonist" "Old-Timer" was the city editor of the same journal. I do not remember that a disagreeable word ever passed between Mr. Hogan and myself. His office in Hamilton was in a small, two-story brick building, situated on the east side of Hughson street, between King and Main streets, but nearest Main street. Hugh B. Wilson, another lawyer and prominent U. E. Loyalist, had his office in the same house; so had Geo. S. Tiffany, the Reform leader. Paola Brown was the janitor and lived with his family in the basement. I do not think there is a vestige of that house left to-day.

I have by no means made mention yet of all the Irish prominent in Hamilton in the early forties. There was the great mercantile firm of Buchanan, Harris & Co. Isaac Buchanan in those days was known as the "Prince of Merchants." He had wholesale stores in Glasgow, Liverpool, New York, Montreal, Toronto and Hamilton, besides other cities that I am not certain about. He was the Reform candidate in Toronto for the first united parliament of Canada in 1841, along with John Henry Dunn and was elected. He was of Highland Scotch extraction, with strong Irish sympathies. Mr. Harris, his chief Hamilton partner, was of Irish birth, but not demonstratively Irish. He was at one time president of the Great Western Railroad Co., and prominent in other enterprises; and probably was at one time president of the St. Patrick's Society. He was a good business man and a good citizen of Hamilton. Alas, both are long since dead. The only Hamiltonian of the early days now alive that I often saw and well remember, is Mr. Donald McKay of Gordon & McKay, wholesale merchants, on Front street, Toronto. He must be now bearing his three score years and thirty. He went to Hamilton from Montreal about 1840.

I wish to make further reference to the early hotel-keepers of Irish nationality, not yet mentioned in these papers. There was John Bradley, who kept the "British Coffee House," a substantial stone hostelry on the east side of the Court House Square and close to the "Gazette" office. I am not aware of the late Mr. Bradley's particular section of Ireland, but I do know he was a good-natured gentleman and a great practical joker. When I was an urchin he once challenged me to run a race with him on the sidewalk in front of his pre-

mises and allowed me to outstrip him. He used to delight in telling his guests how a Yankee once got the better of his sagacity by selling him basswood hams and wooden nutmegs, and sometimes exhibited the goods. At another time when the lawyers of the Gore district were having a banquet at his hotel and the toast of the "Bar of Canada" was proposed, Mr. Bradley jumped up to respond and assured them that whenever they favored him with their presence at his bar he would present them with the very best that Canada afforded.

"Billy" Daley I believe I have already referred to. He kept what

might be called "a road house" on a corner of King street west, opposite the residence of the late Hon. Samuel Mills and did a thriving country trade with farmers and others. It was one of the old-fashioned wooden country taverns, two storys in height with a large hallway in the centre of it, the house painted white, and green Venetian blinds to the windows. He had "good accommodation for man and beast," a warm welcome and a pleasant way with him. He was a person of rotund build and was usually called "Billy." Another man of a good deal the same kind of material was Alexander Borland, whose hostelry was about a mile further west on the Dundas road. Borland seemed to understand his business and what he did not know about hotelkeeping his wife did. Mrs. Borland was a sister of John Hand, the renowned Hamilton printer, reputed to be the fastest compositor in America, in those days, and one of the founders of "The Times" newspaper. The most popular place of entertainment in the forties in Hamilton was the house of Mrs. Wilson, afterwards Mrs. Beatty, on the south-east corner of John and Main streets.

Mrs. Wilson was a widow, and the mother of Thomas Wilson, afterwards partner of Sir Frank Smith in London and Toronto. James Wilson, another son, was a merchant in Hamilton at a later date. Thomas Beatty, whom she married when she abandoned her widowhood, was a merchant in Dundas, in partnership with a brother, but he took up his residence in Hamilton after his marriage with Mrs. Wilson. He was a portly man, a good fellow, a pleasant companion, and a good Irishman. Mrs. Beatty was a lady of many graces, a beautiful presence, and a devoted Catholic. It was a favor for boarders to get a room in her house and many unmarried Catholic gentlemen were her guests.

How many Hamiltonians are there now alive who remember "Old Pat" Harvey, the Waterloo soldier, who kept his tidy little drinking place next to Alexander Carpenter's tin and stove shop, and subsequently on McNab street near James. Printers were among his customers and I remember going once to the latter place with the Smiley boys to hear Pat tell about his Waterloo experience. "Pat," said one of the boys, "how did you feel when going into battle?" "At first," said he, "I shivered all over, but when we got into the 'hate' of the thing it was like going to a wedding."

In the forties there was not a tradesman in Hamilton that had more respect or deserved it more than Samuel McCurdy, custom tailor. He made a large portion of the fashionable clothing of the gentlemen of Hamilton. He was a handsome man, he was an intelligent man and a good man, and had a good trade. He was a long time a resident of the town, and I remember how he once

regaled me with a tale of his early personal vicissitudes in establishing a foothold in that city. He told me how he assisted John Sheridan Hogan to get apprenticed to a Hamilton printer, but who that printer was has escaped me. He lamented over the scandal many poor immigrant Irish Catholics gave by debasing

themselves with liquor at a time when the stuff was so cheap and plenty. I was at his house at the time in 1847, when news came of the death of Bishop Power and Vicar-General Macdonell in Toronto, and both himself and his good wife were greatly affected by the sad intelligence. The Vicar had been the parish priest of Hamilton for many years and was greatly beloved.

I remember well when "Tim" Murphy and his brothers "Dan" and John came to Hamilton to establish a mercantile business. It was, perhaps, in 1844. "Tim" came first. I was looking out of a window in John Robertson's printing office, southeast corner of King and Hughson streets, when I noticed S. Oliver, the auctioneer, who occupied the ground floor of this same corner as auction rooms, crossing King street, accompanied by a strange gentleman, who was short of stature, wore a dress coat and swung his arms. That was my first view of "Tim" Murphy, the gentleman who accompanied Mr. Oliver. Mr. Murphy had a presence that would attract any one's attention. He was a pleasing man in appearance and indicated a large amount of energy, push and "get-there." Presently both gentlemen made their appearance in the printing office and Mr. Oliver introduced Mr. Murphy to Mr. Robertson, the printer. Mr. M. produced the copy of a "whole sheet" poster that he wanted printed. It was headed:

"Make way for the chequered store!"

store!

It was a grocery business that Mr. Murphy came to establish. "The poster" gave a list of prices for goods that made them far below the prices then prevailing generally in Hamilton. The "chequered store" was not yet painted, but next day a man was at work on the job. It was Miller, who painted Hamilton signs in those days, and a good sign painter he was. The chequered store was on the south side of King street about midway between John and Hughson streets. It was a three-story brick building, with an ample depth. Winer's drug store was next to it, and John Young's grocery store only two or three doors east of it. When the front of the store was all painted in checkers it looked well and it was a great success. All of "Cork Town" flocked to it, and many clerks were employed. It was always full of customers. The three brothers were always busy. There were soon imitations of this chequered store. I found one in Aurora, Illinois, once. It belonged to a Mr. Hurd, a Hamilton man, who had previously been associated with John Winer, the druggist. This Mr. Hurd was Irish too, as his name indicated. He thought it good business to imitate "Tim" Murphy, and put a chequered front on his Aurora drug store. The next move of the Murphys was to open a branch of their business in London, of which Mr. Daniel Murphy took charge, and it, too, was a success. But the career of this branch of the great Murphy clan was not a protracted one. That fell destroyer, consumption, came and cut them down one by one, as it had done the Smiley family that had founded the Hamilton "Spectator." Others of my old Hamilton worthies must remain unnoticed for another issue.

WILLIAM HALLEY.

The Catholic register : Vol. 13, no. 38
(Sept. 21, 1905)

